1: Herskovits F-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

tial structure with rounded arches in the Roman style, roofed over, like most other buildings, with galvanized iron. Other public buildings are the town hall — the Mairie — and the "Hall of Justice"; near by are the stone walls of a public building begun some years ago as a school, but destined apparently to house what is known as the "Bureau of Contributions," a euphemism for the tax-collector's quarters. Despite the fact that Mirebalais was one of the most difficult regions for the American occupation to subdue during the Caco uprising of 1918-20,[10] it was one of the first districts where the Guarde d'Haiti was completely Haitianized, and from which all American Marine officers were withdrawn. Only a small detachment is stationed there at present. Its well-kept barracks are near the church, and the prisons form a part of the same compound, from whence issue daily the striped-suited prisoners, men and women, under guard or alone on parole, who do communal work in the town and the near-by countryside.

The town awakens at dawn to the chattering of domesticated guinea-fowl and the crowing of cocks. Occasionally a camion rumbles through the principal thoroughfare; more rarely an automobile dashes by in great clouds of dust on its way to Las Cahobas, or Hinche, or Santo Domingo City. If it is a market day, the streets are early filled with country folk on their way to dispose of their produce, and the clatter from the market place behind the church is heard everywhere until the heat of the day brings a lull to all commerce, and drowsiness once more settles over everything. By mid-afternoon during the planting season, drums can be heard over the countryside. The sounds are not those of the "throbbing" voodoo drums — though they have more than once been mistaken for them by travelers — but they set the rhythm for the communal work of the *combites*, which perform cooperative agricultural labor. As the rapid dusk follows the disappearance of the sun behind the mountains, the voices of

1: Herskovits E-4,5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Microlab

342

ABOVE, *A country dwelling.*
BELOW, *A combite at work.*

(facing P. 11)

Li Hamburton E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 EV3 Haiti EV3
Mirebalais

done by the owner himself only if the field is very small; otherwise one of the co-operative work-groups that form such an important element in Haitian rural economy must be called.

The regulation of communal labor in Mirebalais, though extremely informal, is none the less effective. There are three or four types of such organizations, none of which requires a large outlay of funds on the part of the one whose land is being worked, and only one of which, the "mutual association," has any restriction as to membership. In this last case, three or four or five men agree to work for each other a given number of hours, rotating their working period of three hours or half a day in the fields of each of the parties to the agreement. The other co-operative groups vary principally as to their size and the time of day when their work is carried on. The smallest is the *mire*, which consists of perhaps half a dozen or ten men who come to help a neighbor in his work, and labor from early morning until about the middle of the morning. A somewhat larger group, who work from about this time until midday, is known as a *coup de main*. Finally, there is the *combite*, the Mirebalais form of the characteristic organization for mutual self-help known elsewhere in Haiti as the *Société Conge*.[8]

Though strenuous physical labor is involved in the work of the *combite*, for the Haitian it symbolizes recreation and enjoyment — the stimulus of working with one's fellows, the pleasure of gossiping with friends, and the partaking of the feast which marks the climax of the day. All this makes the occasion one to be anticipated and enjoyed, and no one witnessing ten or fifteen men on horseback, each with a hoe over his shoulder, shouting and laughing as they clatter by at full gallop, can fail to sense their eager desire to arrive at their destination, a near-by *combite*.[9]

When a man or a woman needs help in preparing a field — for women, particularly those who sell in the market, may often become wealthy and large cultivators — a request is

1: Herskovits E-4,8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

made of key-men in the district informally called *chefs d'escouade*. They have the reputation of being those to whose call a number of men, perhaps a dozen, perhaps two or three times that many, will respond and come to give the aid that is desired. Such a person is given a "bouquet"—a bottle of *clairin*—which insures the appearance of himself and his group on the date set. A *combite* may be held at any time during the week except Sundays, which are dedicated to rest, and Tuesdays (in earlier times Mondays), when tradition holds a person must be free to work his own fields and care for tasks needed to be done at his own house. There is no requirement in either law or custom to respond to the call for communal work, and the larger landowners, who usually reside in the towns, rarely participate in a *combite*. So great is the pleasure derived from work *of this sort*, however, and so living is the realization among the peasantry of its potential benefits, that a man hesitates before he refuses to take part in a *combite* to which he has been summoned. Sometimes a man who has been faithful in his attendance at *combites* and has worked well at them falls ill during the time for planting or for clearing his ground of underbrush or for hoeing. In such case a *combite* is summoned, and even though this man is unable to offer the usual feast, his services are remembered and the men work with a will to insure the proper preparation of his ground.

The scene in a field where a large *combite* is at work is an arresting one. The men form a line, with a drummer in front of their hoes. The *simidor*, who leads the singing as he works with the others, adds the rhythm of his song to the regular beats of the drum, thus setting the time for the strokes of the implements wielded by the workers. This drum, slung about the neck of the drummer, is of the European form, never the hollowed-out African type that figures in religious rites. Its sound can carry far, however, and thus it not only beats the time for the hoes, but notifies all concerned that the *combite*

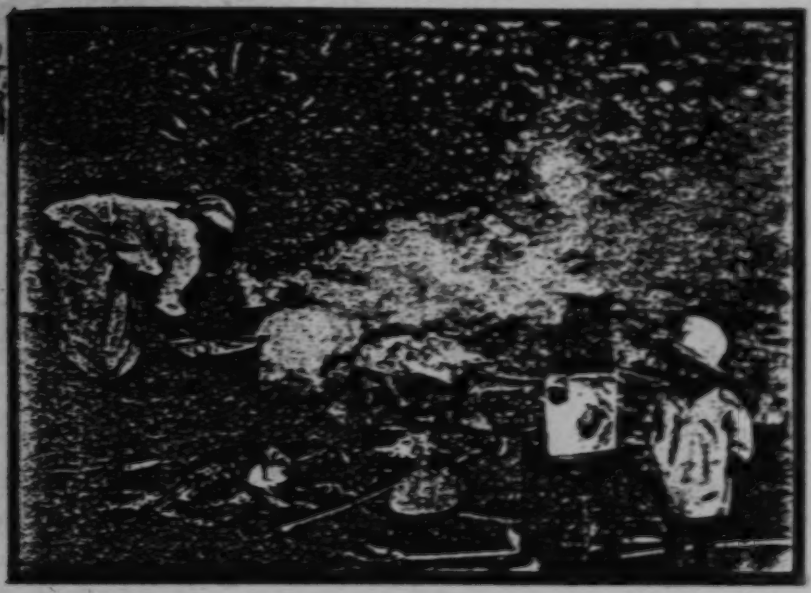
1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

is under way. The size of the *combite* is judged by the number of drums and *lambi*, or conch-shell horns used, for where two or three of either are required, an especially large group of workers is usually assembled. It may be observed in passing that it is undoubtedly the sound of this *combite* drum, heard in the mountains or through the brush by travelers, that has so often been mistaken for the "mysterious booming" of the *vodun* drums.[4]

The preparation of the food is the work of the women of the household giving the *combite*, aided by their female relations and the wives of friends and neighbors. This is no small task, for goats and even a bullock may be killed to feed a large *combite*, while in addition other dishes to go with the meat must be cooked. Each woman is given charge of a great pot and does her best to see to it that an appetizing dish is ready for the men when their work is done. While the food is being cooked, the real object of the *combite*, the clearing of the field, is being pursued. A *chef d'esquade*, usually with a small group, begins the afternoon's labor, and, being a fast worker, he himself sets the pace. As more men arrive, he walks about, encouraging the constantly increasing number of men in their efforts, seeing to it that the tempo originally set is continued, and when necessary picking up a hoe to restore a lagging rhythm. Occasionally the *chef d'esquade* will stand in front of the men to make sure that all keep together, and if the lazy cannot be roused to work by direct order or through ridicule, he will drive them away.

The work progresses with incredible speed as the line moves down the field. In one case a *combite* of between fifty and seventy-five men completely cleared a field of several acres in a single afternoon, and this without undue effort or what appeared to be the expenditure of much energy. The flashing of the hoes in the brilliant sunlight accentuates the color of the scene; each implement is raised high above the head of the one who wields it, to be brought down at the proper in-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais



ABOVE, *Preparing the food for a combite feast.*
BELOW, *Drums marking the beat for the hoes.*

[facing P. 72]

J. Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mbwbolab

stant and in almost perfect accord with the hoes of all the other men in line. Pauses are frequent, and men often drop out of the line for a longer period of rest — even those not of the type laughingly called *majeurs*, who shirk their task and come to a *combite* principally to share in the feasting — and these, for the time being, join the singing with added verve. During the periods of rest, re-alignments are made and, if necessary, the direction of the line is changed; after a short time, however, the cry of the *simidor* rings out, the initial statement of a song is sounded, and as the chorus swings into the melody, the hoes rise again, the beat of the drum is begun, the plaintive notes of the *lambi* are heard, and the workers once more move down the field.[a]

Acting as the representative of the owner of the field to be cleared is a man who is called the *directeur*. If a large number of workers, a hundred or more, are assembled, he may divide them into two groups, assigning each half of the field, and then there is competition to see which group will first complete its allotted task. On such an occasion there would not only be more than one drum, but also more than one principal singer, or *simidor*, and the songs would thereupon have improvised words boasting of the prowess of the winning side, and ridiculing its opponents. The "director" also apportions the food, for it is customary to follow the rule which holds that since not all workers are equally eager or competent, so the rewards should not be the same for all. The shirkers are well known. They come but a little before sunset, or, arriving earlier, dawdle, walking about with their hoes and accomplishing but little during the afternoon. The lack of enthusiasm of these *majeurs* for work does not escape the "director," for though all who come to the *combite* must be fed, such men receive relatively little, while those who have worked the hardest not only are rewarded with dishes heaped with especially choice morsels of meat, but often find several sous when they reach the bottom of the dish.

Li Herskovits E-4,5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Miscellaneous

The *combite* songs are distinctive in Haitian music for their melodic quality. Sung in unison, as is characteristic of most forms of Negro music, they contain the statement of a theme by the leader and a response from a chorus, so that the contrast between this great volume of sound from the chorus and the solo voice of the *simidor* is singularly effective. It is not the melodic qualities alone that make these songs so appealing to the Haitians, however. At the *combite* a man not only learns all the gossip of the day, but enjoys learning and singing the songs which caustically comment on the shortcomings of neighbors, or evaluate the hospitality of those who have called *combites*, or detail scandal, phrased with sufficient directness to allow the reference of the song to remain clear, but warily, so as not to give the individual pilloried ground for direct recrimination. The *simidor* is thus a person to be feared, since in addition to his ability as a singer and a leader of song, he is also an outstanding improviser. As one Haitian expressed it, "The *simidor* is a journalist, and every *simidor* is a Judas!"

One or two examples of these songs will make clear their favor among a people to whose natural love of gossip is added a patterned relish for oblique public statement of individual shortcomings. The first comments on a miserly *combite* host:

À tè!	Down!
Moin dit, messieurs,	I say, messieurs,
Moin p'valé nan combite ça-é	I went to that *combite*
Moin pas mangé.	[But] I did not eat.
Moin allé, moin pas joinne un grogue	I went, but I found no drink
Pour moin buè.	To drink.
Assé-a! En è!	Enough! Up!
Moin dit, messieurs,	I say, messieurs,
M'allé nan combite ça-é	I went to that *combite*

L: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

Moin pas joinne mangé	[But] I found no food
Pou' m'mangé.	To eat.

Another song refers to a pungent bit of local gossip, which, though known to everyone, concerned an affair that precluded the mention of names. This is usually the case, for it is not ordinarily deemed wise to make specific references; yet this must not be thought of as an invariable rule, as is shown by the fact that a number of these songs were recorded where names were mentioned with great freedom. Thus in Mirebalais as elsewhere, circumstances must govern cases; the composer of the following short song did not feel it politic to do more than recall the case:

Ca va reglé,	This will be arranged,
En é, o!	Up, o!
Affai' cousine germaine	The affair of a first cousin
A'c cousin germain.	With her first cousin.

Reference is also made to an impending quarrel where a suspicion of magic practices entered:

Moin dit, Judas,	I say, Judas,
Allé l'église;	Go to the church;
Quand ou apè tourné	When you return
Ou à quittè moin tranquille, o-o;	You will leave me in peace, o-o;
Si ou allé l'église,	If you go to the church,
Ou apè quittè moin tranquille, o-o.	You will leave me in peace, o-o.

Still another song is a challenge, for in it the singer boasts that he is the equal of the man figuratively designated in it, and will cause trouble if resisted:

À tè!	Down!
M'apé mandé qui moune	I ask what person
Qui en dedans caille là.	Is in that house.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

Compère répond':	My friend replies:
"C'é' moin qui avec cousine moin."	"It is I who am with my cousin."
Assé-é!	Enough!
Moin en dedans déjà.	I am already inside.
En é-é-o!	Up, o!
Nan point taureau	No bull
Passé taureau.	Is better than [this] bull.
En é-o!	Up, o!

Finally, there may be cited a composition which complains against a shirker who comes and eats, but does little work:

Samba, é-é,	Samba, é-é,
Moin vé ou malhonnet,	I see that you are a dishonest man,
Tonnèrre!	*Tonnèrre!* *
Moin planté mais moin,	I plant my maize,
L'année rive,	The year rolls round,
Moin planté mangé,	I plant food,
Ou apé managé li.	You eat it.
En é-é-o!	In the air!
Moin planté zabocs,	I plant avocados,
Ça pou' ou mangé,	They are for you to eat,
Ou malhonnet-o.	You are a dishonest man-o.
Tonnèrre!	*Tonnèrre!*

The field cleared and hoed, the work of planting begins. This is carried on in accordance with a well-defined calendar of agriculture, which takes as its starting-point the beginning of the rains. Maize, which matures quickly, is the first crop, and is planted during the latter part of March or early in April, unless the rains are delayed, when it is planted later that month. Congo peas, which mature less rapidly, are put

* *Tonnèrre*, "thunder," is a Haitian-French oath; the original is retained because in translation its force is lost.

[illegible] 8-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Murdock

land, whose bodies are buried in it, and whose spirits watch over it. As has been shown in the discussion of property, land in Haiti is owned privately, and, once title has passed, is subject to no alienation, except at the will of the owner — an attitude also held toward property of other categories, as is evidenced by the fact that most of the possessions of a man, particularly his livestock, are marked for identification, and theft is severely punished. Even the disposal of stray animals whose owners cannot be identified must follow well-defined legal procedure, in accordance with which they are held by the officers of the commune for a stated period of time before being sold at public auction. All marks on these animals are carefully noted in the records, so that title to them may be duly established.

In the organization of production and distribution an African mold, if not full content, predominates. The co-operative work-system, which is so important in maintaining agricultural production, is directly related to comparable groupings of West Africa, of which a distinctive form is the *dokpwe* of Dahomey, described when the African origins of Haitian culture were examined. The *combite*, as an instrument of co-operative labor and mutual self-help, with its tradition of giving no pecuniary reward for work done, but of making the feast which comes at the end of the day's labor adequate return — all these represent pure retentions of African practice. Even more striking is the carry-over in the attitudes which go with these outer forms — the manner in which the participants look forward with pleasant anticipation to taking part in *combites*, the enjoyment which they derive from their group work, and the verve with which the work is done are clear expressions of these attitudes. The role of the *combite*-song in exercising social control and enforcing conformity to local custom is entirely African, as is its function in stimulating work by setting a rhythm for it.

African, too, is the institution of the market, though in this

2: Coastlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 BV3 Hubb BV3
[P112-F]
241
E91
•L96
412

133
457
231
53

1. Coastline, southern Main. Vaccine plagues at the right; flag of the coastal at the left.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3
[P.112-G]
142
302
534
202
476

9. *Calling the coumbite: signaling on a conch-shell trumpet.*

243
241
476
516

10. *A woman's coumbite weeding a cornfield near the town of Plaisance.*

a massacre in the western part of the Dominican Republic which took the lives of an estimated five thousand to fifteen thousand Haitians. The survivors fled homeward, and many were settled in frontier areas by the government. Even so, today there are believed to be some sixty or seventy thousand Haitians still living east of the border. Large numbers of Haitians, particularly men, migrated to Cuba in the years following World War I, in search of better wages in the cane fields. By 1931 there were more than eighty thousand Haitians in that country.[1] But resentment by local Cuban labor and the onset of the depression combined to force the repatriation of great numbers of them. Thirty thousand Haitians came home from Cuba in the years 1936 and 1937 alone.

Solution of Haiti's problem of overpopulation does not seem imminent. The obvious answers would seem to be birth control, emigration, wiser use of natural resources, and industrialization. Since the country is predominantly Catholic, and since much social value is placed on children, birth control seems unlikely. And as health facilities become more widespread and infant mortality drops, the pressure will become more acute. Emigration seems to offer no hope, since neighboring islands and countries on the mainland give no encouragement. The Haitian may yet learn to conserve his land and to get more out of it, to stock his lakes with fish, and to bring more fish in from the sea. But this will not suffice. Nothing is left but industrialization, and that seems to be a thing of the far-distant future.

Nevertheless, the character of Haitian life remains essentially agrarian. The displaced peasant, whether he is now a hotel "houseboy," a taxi driver, or a cane cutter, dreams of returning to the land some day and growing bananas, coffee, and cotton that will make him independent. In far-off places such as Havana and New York, Haitians work and save money with the expectation that one day they will come home, buy fifteen or twenty acres of ground, build a new house, and live out their lives as decently prosperous *habitants*. The traditions of the agricultural society, along with Vodoun, continue to play a significant role in the life of the people.

One such tradition is the institution of the *coumbite*, a loosely knit cooperative work party of neighbors and friends. The word itself probably comes from the Spanish *convide*, or *convite*, meaning "to invite." A member of the group holds a coumbite by notifying his fellow members that on such-and-such a day his fields will require clearing or hoeing. There are several variants of the work gathering. One, called *carré* or *corvée*, meets at irregular intervals and only on special invitation. There are no regular reciprocal obligations in the *corvée*; the workers are

[1] [Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," Journal of Negro History, October, 1940, P. 515. Cf. P 352, Category 116. --Analyst]

D. Courlander 8-6 (1939-1943) 1966 893 Haiti 893

compensated by a "feast" and party given at the end of the day by the host. More usual than the *coumbite* is the regular sharing of work on one another's fields—the *rounde*, or "taking turns."

An early morning work gathering is known as a *dimount jou*'. It meets early in the day, sometimes before dawn, continues until ten or eleven in the morning, when the sun becomes hot, and then disperses. An afternoon coumbite is called a *dine-machete* (dinner machete) and lasts from about two in the afternoon until early evening. When the work is finished, the men go to the house of the host, where they have dinner, much in the manner of the American threshing party. An all-day affair is called a *grand coumbite*.

Essential to all coumbites are musicians and singing leaders. The instruments used are various, according to local custom. In the south they are usually drums, *tymbales*, and bamboo trumpets. In some areas of the north, the *lambi*, or conch-shell trumpet, is favored.

According to the custom in the south, on the day of the coumbite the drummers arise in the false dawn before sunrise and begin a roundabout march to the home of the host. They pass before the huts of all the neighbors who are going to join the party, playing a *rappel* on the drums. By one's and two's the workers come down the trails to join the procession, bringing hoes, machetes, or sickles as required. As the marching group grows larger, there is talking, laughter, and perhaps singing. Most of the men who join the procession are from close by. Others who may have to travel from a distance, perhaps from the next valley, go directly to the house of the host. When the workers arrive there, the women of the house serve coffee. This is the usual breakfast of the Haitian peasant.

Then the drummers play another *rappel*, and the men go down to the field that is to be tilled. There may be ten, twenty, or fifty of them. Some coumbites are even larger. If the group is a small one, the men line up together. The singing leader, called a *sanba* or *simidor*, begins a song, the drummers play, the hoes begin to rise and fall in unison, and the workers join in the singing. If the group is large it will divide into two or three squads, each trying to outdo the other. The men stand shoulder to shoulder, moving the hoes up and down together, syncopating their movements by pauses as they sing their responsive parts. Sometimes tafia or rum is portioned out. The squads move forward slowly, inching their way across the field. The sanba beats on his hoe blade with a stone to keep time for his song. His job is to "encourage" the men. He may sing old familiar songs or compose new ones, songs with humor and bite in them, ribald songs, and songs of ridicule. They may criticize

men who have failed to join the coumbite, or praise the host, or single out various individuals for comment. The songs of the coumbite are a newspaper of the affairs of the people. The news is personalized, editorialized, and replete with comic vignettes.[1]

At noon the drummers signal a halt, and the workers shoulder their hoes, wipe off their machetes, and adjourn to the house for food. If it is a grand coumbite, the men rest for several hours, talking, catching up on sleep, or playing cards or *mayouka*. About three o'clock they go back to the fields to work until evening. There comes the feast, under the canopy adjoining the house. The host and his wife have killed and cooked one or more goats, depending on the size of the group. The men are served meat, rice, beans, and whatever else has been prepared. [273] Afterward, women join the party, and there is more tafia or rum. Some of the men then drift homeward, but most stay on for dancing. Zevas, Congo, or John drums are brought out, and the festivities begin. If another coumbite is not scheduled for the next day, the music and dancing may last well into the night.

Women, too, have coumbites to perform various kinds of large tasks, from field work to winnowing and coffee sorting, though in general the women's work groups lack the festive character of the men's gatherings.

There is a more tightly knit form of coumbite, known as a *société*. In southern Haiti there are the société Congo and the société Martinique; in northern Haiti there is the société Cayé. These sociétés are clubs built around mutual work needs and recreational activities. The société Congo that appears in the town or city streets during Rara days, with bamboo or conch-shell trumpets, drums, flags, and masks, is usually composed of the men who have joined forces to till the fields. In some instances, it may also conform roughly to membership in a particular houmfor, or cult center. Unlike the ordinary coumbite, the société is not a group which meets only at ground-breaking or harvesting time; it is a permanent organization with regular, sometimes day-to-day, obligations. Work after work is thrown from one man's land to another, doing the tasks that have to be done. There is no question of "Can you come?" The group goes first to one man's land, then to another's until all the work has been done. If a member of the société falls sick, so that he cannot work his own field, the société takes over his tasks for him.

Coumbites are held not only for agricultural work but for house-building, and sometimes for the building of a houmfor.

[191] The Haitian coöperative work group has much in common with European and American husking and barn-building parties; but it has

[For footnote see Category 116, P. 352. -- Anal 1957]

J. Courlander 8-6 (1877-1949) 1932 973 H668 973

many non-European characteristics. The manner of work, even down to specific motor activity, has direct and hardly disputable West African connections. Instead of the short-handled West African hoe, the Haitians use a long-handled one, and they work more erect than stooped. But the rhythmic, synchronized use of the hoe, the singing leader and the musicians who stand to one side to "encourage" the workers, the calling of the workers by drum *rappels*, the special consideration for the sick, and the concept of long-term community endeavor are all of West African beginnings. The coumbite is the legitimate descendant of the Dahomean *dokpwe*, the *kuwon* of the Mandiba (Cameroons), the *ku* of the Kpelle (Liberia), and other West African cooperative systems.

Although the *dokpwe* of Dahomey is a more formal and intricate institution, permeated with certain abstract and ritual concepts, its social and functional characteristics are not greatly different from those of the Haitian coumbite, in which cooperation is marked. Herskovits notes that working with the Dahomean *dokpwe*

> represents recreation rather than labor to the individual member. There is song and dance to drumming and the sound of gongs, on the way and after arrival, and there is feasting and an exhibition of skill. It is an impressive sight to see from forty to a hundred men kneeling earth for walls, or laying thatch, or hoeing the earth with unison movements to the accompaniment of conversation and laughter, and the songs of each of their fellows, who, for the moment at rest, have constituted themselves the chorus.

When more than one *dokpwe* is summoned for work on the same project, Herskovits notes,

> there is great rivalry among the organizations to see which one will first complete its allotted task. If only one *dokpwe* is present, there is either individual rivalry, or the *dokpwe* may be divided into two groups which compete one against the other. The food which is provided at these times of collective labor is as rich fare as the owner can afford . . .[1]

An underlying factor in the Dahomean *dokpwe* is awareness of itself as "the manpower of Dahomey," and the members regard themselves as exercising their fundamental privilege as Dahomeans. This attitude toward the coumbite continues to prevail in Haiti. Like the houngfor—but even more significantly in terms of routine, workaday life—the coumbite and the société are an expression of social ties and of the pervading interest in the common welfare.

Certain patterns of the coumbite have been carried over into non-agrarian labor in the towns and cities, wherever group work is required. The carrying of coffee and sugar bags in the warehouses, the loading of ships, and the repairing of roads—all are traditionally performed

[1] [Herskovits, "Some Aspects of Dahomean Ethnology," Africa, Vol. V (July, 1932), pp. 266-296. Cf. p. 352, Category 116. -- Analyst.]

533 477 128 461 rhythmically, to the accompaniment of drums, *catas*, or horns, while a singing leader composes topical songs in which the laborers join.

171 412 The tools which a rural Haitian chooses, and the way he uses them, often are in a West African tradition. He performs a multitude of tasks with his machete, or bush knife: weeding a garden, peeling an orange, cutting down a tree, making a drum or mortar, opening a coconut. It is an all-purpose tool, as it is in Africa. Until a few years ago it was supplemented by the extra-long, heavier, "double machete." The axe and the chisel are known and used too, but the machete is supreme.

492 [547] [412] The hoe is the tool for tilling the soil, even in the flat country, and even though the Haitian has horses and cattle which could pull a plow. Horses are for riding and not for pulling. In carrying loads, the Haitian peasant still prefers the head to the shoulders. If he has a donkey, the donkey will carry for him. An old Haitian proverb goes: "Merci Bondieu pou' bourrique li, si nous pas gainyain bourrique li fout Haitien po'té tout bagaille" (Thank God for the donkey, if we didn't have the donkey the Haitian would have to carry everything)." Generally speaking, the rough and rocky terrain of Haiti and inadequate secondary roads have done nothing to encourage the use of carts or wagons.

[538] 489 491 473

171 [251] [372] Corn is stored in the trees, as in West Africa, or in granaries built upon stilts, also as in West Africa. The Haitian makes his fire in the African fashion, with several long sticks or poles meeting point-to-point in the heart of the fire. As the ends are consumed, the sticks are pushed toward the center. Grain is pulverized in large wooden mortars, as in West Africa, and winnowed in a woven tray. Fish traps are sometimes woven in the traditional West African manner, and fishermen often set their nets in converging spirals and beat the water with sticks to drive the fish to the center. And on the rivers and lakes are to be seen dugout canoes of a kind familiar on the inland waters of West Africa.

[252] [227] [225] [501]

171 241 The folklore of the fields contains many themes known to the West African. One old Haitian farmer, discussing the spiritual relationship of the planter to the earth, declared that a man must be strong and potent when he plants, else the crops will be vitiated and sickly. For this reason, he said, a man must not plant seeds the day after he has had sexual intercourse, because he has been temporarily drained of his life-giving powers.[9]

[834]

171 538 The tale of the hoe that worked by itself in the fields is also widespread. It enters many animal and Bouki stories, and also is known in a form that is familiar in West Africa. In this story, there was once a man who owned a hoe which worked by itself whenever a magical formula was pronounced. It would stop working whenever the magical

9 [For footnote, see Category 116, P 352.-- Analyst]

D. Courlander 8-6 (1937-1963) 1963 893.1663 893

535 *Rabodo, or Rombodo:* Danced [illegible] occasion of building a new house.
535 *Mouvet:* Danced by a social [illegible] work on the land of one of its members.
535 476 *Ti Counda:* Another social work dance, sometimes closely related to Vodoun ritual. Known in Brazil as Macumba.
Kouer, or Coumbajolie: A dance connected with communal work celebrations.[9]

Rara and Carnival Dances

535 541 *Rara, also called Cherisprit, Lavalouri, and Vaccine:* The perambulating dances of the Rara festival.
Mascarou, or Cacrapi: Danced for the Mardi Gras.
Pailleur: Any carnival dance in costume.
Ramassie: A carnival stick dance with West African parallels.
Tchal Rikan: The carnival Magpie dance.
Congo Pailleur: The "Straw Congo," or "Costume Congo," the carnival dance of the [illegible] Congo. It is also known as Cipé and Congo Mardi Gras.
Rabordage: A Mardi Gras perambulating dance.
Chalocha: A Mardi Gras dance in which the participants are dressed as nineteenth-century generals. Comic mimicry. Also referred to as Charles Quint.
Zinjan
Rabon
Mayouse

Other Secular and Miscellaneous Dances

535 *Zouc:* A gaga dance of northern Haiti.
Calinda: A stick battle dance. Also a dance of the Calinda "social society."
Ka: A dance which takes its name from the *ka*, a tambour drum.
Bèlè, or Belair
Mangonlou
Ti Crèp: This is regarded by some informants as one of the Pitou dances.
Malfini: "The Hawk," a dance of northern Haiti.
Pinyaque: A simple "good time" dance.
Bamboché: A simple "good time" dance.
Bamboche: A "good time" dance. The term is often used to designate any social dance. As a verb, *bamboché* means "to dance" or "to have a good time."

Secular Dances of European Type

535 179 *Meringue:* There are three main types of Meringue—the drawing-room Meringue, the ordinary "ballroom" Meringue, and the Meringue Coumbajolie (which is fast and agitated). A development of the last decade or so is the jazz Meringue.
Ti Bobine: This is a sort of square dance, though it is sometimes danced in Meringue style.
Minwet, or Minuet: The minuet.
Polka
Waltz
Quadrille
Mazurka
Contredanse

9 [Footnote appears on p. 352, Category 116.--Analyst]

[P.166]

15. Secret-Society Songs

Secret societies were once common in Haiti, as they were in other parts of the New World where West Africans settled in large numbers. The institution of the secret society was strong in various parts of West Africa from which the slaves came. The tradition was particularly notable among the tribes of Nigeria.[1] In the New World it offered to slaves and to freed Negroes an opportunity for social organization and fraternal relationships which otherwise had been pretty well shattered by the nature of slavery and the profuse admixture of cultures. A number of elderly Haitians have suggested that it was the Haitian secret societies rather than the Vodoun and Congo cults which fomented underground resistance and slave revolts against the French in the last years of the eighteenth century.

At this late date it is difficult to reconstruct much of the secret-society picture. Such groups as may have survived until recently did so in vitiated and changed form. They have been supplanted in large measure by the *société*, a kind of mutual-aid association with both economic and recreational functions. It is exclusive, but not irrevocably so, and it is not secret. The *société* often corresponds roughly with the membership of a *hounfor*, or cult temple.

Old people still talk about true secret societies, however. There was a Moundongue secret society, separate from the Moundongue cult, whose members were recruited from the survivors of the Moundongue tribe and their descendants. Other secret societies were not based on tribal affiliation but were recruited from the population at large. One such group was the Vinbindingue, also known as the Blinbindingue and the Balbindingue. Its practices were feared. According to tradition, the Vinbindingue was predatory and held cannibalistic rites, as did other groups such as the Moundongue Society, the Cochon Rouge (the Red Pig Society), the Zezubcanpa, the Cochon Gris (the Gray Pig Society), and the Calinda Society. How much of their reputation for cannibalism was deserved is

[1] [Herskovits, Dahomey, I, P. 256. Cf. P. 353, Category 116. -- Analyst]

easily be hidden, but the gombos were simply slipped into the straw roofs and thus put out of sight. Moreover, by some strange process of reasoning, military authorities regarded the bamboos as "harmless," though they were used for the same purposes as the outlawed drums.

There are numerous other kinds of simple percussion devices. One such instrument, now less commonly seen than previously, is a length of open bamboo laid in the crotches of two Y-shaped sticks set in the ground. Like other cotos, the bamboo is beaten with two sticks. Some Haitians believe that in former days such bamboos were played in batteries like a xylophone.

Sometimes a light-weight wooden cylinder, or perhaps a drum demuled of its playing head, is carried by the timekeeper of a coumbite. It, also, is played on the side with sticks.

Wooden mortars for pulverizing grain take on the character of musical instruments when used in combination with voice. When two or more mortars are used, with two men or women wielding the long pole-like pestles in each mortar, the rhythmic effects can become fairly complicated.

The *claves* or *palos* (small hardwood sticks) are used primarily in connection with secular dances of a Cuban type, or to accompany such instruments as the guitar and the marimba. One stick is held loosely in the natural fold of the hand, so that it is free to vibrate, and is struck sharply with the second stick. The tone is almost metallic because of the hardness of the wood, usually lignum vitæ. The name of the instrument is recognizable as a form of *clavar*, or *clavo*, Spanish for "peg" or "nail." It is thought that wooden shipbuilding pegs provided the name for this device, which has equivalents in West Africa.

Among the folk instruments there are various kinds of horns and trumpets. Cows' horns are played musically in some parts of the southern peninsula, though usually they are used as ritual instruments and signaling devices. Wooden trumpets called *pitons* are carved from the stems of the papaya tree. Conch-shell trumpets, known as *lambis*, are commonly used as signaling devices by fishermen. They are also to be found among the coumbites, in Rara festivities, and occasionally in rituals, where they are usually identified with sea deities. In carnival times the old fashioned phonograph horn makes its appearance as a combined trumpet and voice amplifier.

Probably the most important of the trumpets is the one made of bamboo. It is called a *sarcine* or *bois bourrique*. Both names have interesting origins. The cow's horn was at one time used for magico-medical purposes. The leaf doctor used it as an "applicator" of powders and potions. A small opening was made in the point of the horn, and

[See plate 8, p. 112-F. -- Analyst]

Your shoes, mayoress!
Find your woman, mayoress!
Mayoress-yoress!

(Pallister means "all decorated up," "Lady," "in carnival regalia." It is also the name of a dance, as is mayoress, used here as an exclamation.)

Example 168 was said to be in "Spanish."

Example 169

Go to your mother's house,
Go to your mother's house,
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
Do not come and give me an argument!
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
And do not give me an argument!
Little girl who doesn't know how to wash and iron,
Go home to your mother,
Little girl who doesn't know how to wash and iron,
Go home to your mother!
Angelina, Angelina, go to your mother's house!
Angelina, Angelina, go to your mother's house!

Example 170

Oh I'm not a mule,
Oh I'm not a mule, eh!
The farmer takes me to carry his collect

(A good-natured protest song of the kind often sung by comedians.)

Example 173 has no text. It is exclamatory throughout.

Example 174

E Laina, where should I go, Laina E!
Laina, the children are hypocrites, eh!
Etc.

Example 175

Ewe Mumbo Sauce, I am eating toes
To take away the honey!

Example 176

Adieu kissing kissing kissing.
Oh I say my prayer to God to send rain!

(The first line is ritual language, but it appears to have been originally a phrase recited by the pets' owners.)

relations between the husband and the wife's family, it is nevertheless commonplace for men who can afford it to have more than one wife.

Simpson, in "Sexual and Familial Institutions in Northern Haiti," *American Anthropologist*, October-December, 1942, p. 655, observes that in northern Haiti there are three distinct types of plaçage. "A *femme-caille* shares her mate's house, while a *maman pitite* is a woman who has borne children for a man without living in his house. A *femme placée* does not live in her consort's house, and she has given him no children." Although none of these women has any legal rights of inheritance, Simpson notes, "moral claims to a man's property stand in descending order for these three classes of plaçées."

Johnson, *The Negro in the New World*.

UNESCO, *The Haiti Pilot Project*, p. 18.

Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," *Journal of Negro History*, October, 1940, p. 513.

The group work patterns of Haiti show a common ancestry with Negro gang work patterns in the United States. While nothing as formalized as the combite persists among American Negroes, similarities are striking. The emphasis on rhythm, the swinging of hammers or picks in unison, the need for a singing leader, the responsive chorus, and the frequent use of some kind of percussion to keep time, all derive from a common concept of the nature of group work.

Herskovits, "Some Aspects of Dahomean Ethnology," *Africa*, Vol. V (July, 1932), pp. 266–296.

Cardinall, *Tales Told in Togoland* (p. 109), observes that among the Krachi people of Togoland "no man may have sexual intercourse with a woman for seven days before he goes hunting."

An *Ashanti* story told by Rattray in *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* credits the hedgehog with owning the original hoe; according to this version, the hoe escaped across the sea to the country of the white men, who then possessed the secret. Afterward, the white men brought many hoes to *Ashanti*.

Chapter 11: *Dancing and Dance Drama (pp. 126–136)*

Quoted in Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 73.

Actually a banjo-like instrument of African provenience. The similarity of the word *banza* to *banjo* appears to be more than a coincidence.

Saint-Méry, *De la danse*, as translated by Lillian Moore in "Moreau de Saint-Méry and 'Danse,'" *Dance Index*, October, 1946, p. 238.

Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

Brandy or rum with gunpowder is sometimes drunk by persons possessed by the loa Ogoun, deity of war.

Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

United Nations photograph no. 6065.

Students of United States Negro life will recognize the word *coonjaille* as a variant of *coonjine*, a dance known on the lower Mississippi. According to one observer, Dr. Willis James of Spelman College, Atlanta, small Negro boys on the docks used to call to the boat passengers:

> "Throw me a nickel
> Throw me a dime
> If you want to see me
> Do the coonjine."

The term *coonjine* is still used to mean hand-loading of cotton bales on river boats. When this loading was done mainly by hand some years ago, the stevedores worked rhythmically in a line and sang. An old man from Louisiana testified that within his own memory the deckside *coonjine* was accompanied by makeshift drums and other percussion.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

have been gathered from trees which grew wild. Both men and women labor, with the work divided according to regular custom between the sexes, the men dominating the scene only in the marketing of coffee.

Nature was opulent enough at the beginning of Haitian independence. The wars had ruined irrigation ditches, sugar refineries, and mechanical equipment, but the soil was still abundantly fertile. But generations of farming by people without knowledge of fertilization or soil conservation have worn out much of the land. Trees have been cut to provide lumber and clearings for more farms; in the rainy seasons torrents have coursed down the mountainsides, washing away soil and exposing the earth to the rays of a tropical sun. Because the country is overpopulated every available acre is put to use, and to overuse, thus still more depleting the land. It is a vicious circle, for the next generation must extract yet more from the earth and so weaken it further. Hard work is the lot of the peasant, therefore, during every month of the year except the dry season. There has never been a formal rotation of crops: a farmer continues to plant the same crop in the same field until the harvest is perceptibly smaller than before. Then he changes to another type of produce. Sooner or later he will allow the land to lie fallow for several years until, by the action of nature or the grazing over it of cattle, it has regained a measure of its fertility.

The strenuous work of clearing fields and preparing them for cultivation is man's job. Since the peasants owned their plots it has almost always been done in coöperation by the men of the neighborhood. What on the American frontier would have been called a "bee" is known in Haiti as a *coumbite*, or *combite*, often carried on as an enterprise of the local *Société Congo*, the informal neighborhood group for mutual aid and fellowship.[6]

A man who has a large job on hand announces a coumbite for any day except Sunday, always a day of rest, and whatever other week-

6. The word "coumbite" was apparently borrowed from the Spanish part of the island, and from the Spanish word *convidar*, convey. In Colombia "convite" means exactly what "coumbite" means in Haiti: a gathering of peasants to work in common, or else a coöperative society for mutual agricultural self-help.

Professor Herskovits (*Life in a Haitian Valley*, chap. IV) describes the Société Congo in detail. The use of the name "Congo" indicates the African tradition, and is particularly noteworthy in connection with a kind of coöperative work which Herskovits finds particularly Dahomean.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

day local practice dedicates to work in one's own fields—generally Monday or Tuesday. The prospect of working with one's fellows, of a midday feast with plentiful drink, of singing, talking, and hearing the news, is enough to induce most of the neighbors to come, even though the work will be hard. As with American log-rollings and house-raisings, there is a practical reason for accepting the invitation: by participating in other coumbites a man will be able to invite his neighbors to help him in his own larger tasks. The work is done in rhythm[7] as on Southern road gangs in the United States, with one man specially designated to beat the drum, blow the conch, or sing a topical song, to set the pace. While the men are at work, the women prepare the noonday feast.

This typical characteristic of Haitian rural life has been described in detail as it operates near the village of Mirebalais by Prof. Melville J. Herskovits. His contention is that the custom, in general and in detail, derives from Dahomey, West Africa, the home of many of the original slaves.[8] Although his evidence is impressive, there are nevertheless objections to it. Coöperative enterprise for tasks larger than one man can accomplish alone is common in the United States and in parts of Europe and South America, as well as in Africa. It is not an economic device which strikes one as requiring unusual inventiveness, for cases of it are common even where the participants have had no previous experience of it. Further, Dahomean practice could not have been kept up during slave days, nor yet during the régimes of Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion. (The first three required forced labor under overseers, and landownership by peasants was still rare under Pétion, although a beginning had been made.) In the thirty years from 1790, when the last slaves arrived, until Christophe died in 1820, many old ways were certainly forgotten. Not a single one of the numerous books written by visitors during Boyer's quarter-century, 1818 to 1843, mentions the practice, which certainly must have struck Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Americans if it had been characteristic of the peasant life of the time. If one concludes that the coumbite did not become peasant practice until the mid-nineteenth century, all possibility of contact with Negroes familiar with Dahomean routine has disappeared. What

7. A Haitian poet, Charles F. Pressoir, entitles a book of his verses *Au Rythme des coumbites* (Port-au-Prince, 1933).
8. Op. cit., chap. IV.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

remains is the verbal handing down of recollections, one of the most natural things in the world and one congenial to Haitian peasants. Every region, every village, has its accomplished storytellers. The phenomenal resemblances in detail of the coumbite to Dahomean coöperative work may be due therefore to this verbal tradition.

Once the men have cleared and prepared the field, the care of the crop devolves upon the women. For this there has been a long background of tradition. In African agricultural regions, in the plantations of Saint-Domingue during slave days, under the forced labor régimes of Toussaint and his successors, women had been field workers. They had never known anything else. We have seen that many of the present-day practices of Haiti go back to the times of Pétion and Boyer: during this period women did field work, not by decree of government but by force of circumstance. Their men were constantly taken away from the farms for service in the large army; if crops were to be raised, women must do the work. Sometimes soldiers were stationed near their own homes, and could help in production; but they could be called on to march, at short notice and in peacetime, anywhere in the country. Many of the later presidents made it a definite policy frequently to change the station of regiments, so as to prevent revolutionary projects and guard against the soldiers' being tampered with by the disaffected in any single community.

Sir Harry Johnston records his observations on the Haiti of 1910 as follows:

> The women are the best part of the nation. They are splendid, unremitting toilers. In the face of all discouragements with which a bad Government clouds their existence the women of Haiti remind one of certain patient types of ant or termite, who, as fast as you destroy their labour of months or days, hasten to repair it with unslackening energy. The market-women that descend from the country farms to the Haitian towns know that on their way to the market-place, and in that market-place, they will be robbed by soldiers and officers until the margin of profit on the sale of their wares has practically disappeared. Yet they continue to toil, to raise poultry and cattle, till the fields, see to their gardens, make pottery and mats. They cannot stop to reason, but must go on working from three years old to the end of their lives. Such industry (which is almost equally supplemented by that of the peasant husbands) protected should make Haiti one of the richest countries in the world for its size and population; but so long